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ABSTRACT

This report describes the programs, policies, and strategies developed and implemented by the Tacoma school board in its successful desegregation effort. Particular attention is given to the role that strong school leadership, staff commitment, innovative program planning, and good communication within the community played in helping Tacoma eliminate segregation and provide equal educational opportunities to all of the city's students. The effects of the desegregation effort on the proportion of minority teachers in the district, curriculum development, student and parental attitudes, educational quality, and community cooperation are outlined. (EB)

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN TACOMA, WASHINGTON

A STAFF REPORT OF
THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION
ON CIVIL RIGHTS

May 1979

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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PREFACE

The United States Commission on Civil Rights released on August 24, 1976, its report to the Nation: Fulfilling the Letter and Spirit of the Law: Desegregation of the Nation's Public Schools.

The report's findings and recommendations were based upon information gathered during a 10-month school desegregation project. This included four formal hearings (Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Louisville, Kentucky; and Tampa, Florida); four open meetings held by State Advisory Committees (Berkeley, California; Corpus Christi, Texas; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Stamford, Connecticut); a survey of nearly 1,300 local school districts; and 29 case studies of communities which had difficulties with desegregation, had moderate success with desegregation, or had substantial success with desegregation.

Subsequent to the report's release, considerable interest was generated concerning the specifics of the case study findings, which, owing to space limitations in the national report, were limited to a few brief paragraphs. In an effort to comply with public requests for more detailed information, Commission staff have prepared monographs for each of the case studies. These monographs were written from the extensive field notes already collected and supplemented, if needed, with further interviews in each community. They reflect, in detail, the original case study purpose of finding which local policies, practices, and programs in each community surveyed contributed to peaceful desegregation and which ones did not.

It is hoped that the following monograph will serve to further an understanding of the school desegregation process in this Nation.

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I. BACKGROUND

The city of Tacoma is located in Pierce County, Washington. It is situated on Puget Sound, a major west coast waterway and is 32 miles south of the State's largest city, Seattle.

In 1960 the population of Tacoma was 147,979, of which 7,873 (5.3 percent) were minorities.[1] By 1970, the total population had increased slightly to 154,581, while the minority population of the city doubled during this period. According to the 1970 census, minorities in Tacoma were as follows: blacks, 10,436 (6.8 percent); Hispanics, 2,248 (1.5 percent); Native Americans, 1,703 (1.1 percent); Asian and Pacific Americans, 1,608 (1.0 percent); and other minorities, 452 (0.3 percent).[2]

Tacoma's economic base is derived largely from military installations and support activities, State and local governmental operations, institutions of higher education, the forest industry, metal processing, and shipbuilding.[3] Major employers include the U.S. Government (8,800), State and local government (9,300), the Tacoma school district (3,200), St. Regis Paper Company (2,300), and Weyerhaeuser (2,000).[4]

Tacoma School District No. 10 serves the residents of a 56-square mile area in and around Tacoma. The city of Tacoma comprises approximately 50 square miles, and the remaining 6 square miles include the towns of Fircrest and Ruston and the unincorporated areas of Dash Point, Brown Point, and Hunt's Prairie. The district operates 41 elementary, 10 junior high, 5 high schools, and 1 vocational service center.

In 1963, the first year that student enrollment by race was compiled, minority students numbered 2,924 (just under 9 percent) of the total school district's enrollment of 32,844. By 1969, enrollment in Tacoma's schools increased to 37,186, and the number of minority students increased to 4,991 (13.4 percent). However, as the total enrollment declined to 32,677 in 1975, the minority proportion continued to increase and by 1975 there were 6,101 minority students, comprising 18.7 percent (see table 1).

Table 1
District Student Enrollment

Fall	Am. Ind.	Black	Asian Am.	Sp. Sur.	Total Minorities	All Others	Total
1969	1.3%	9.7%	1.4%	1.0%	13.4%	86.6%	
	453	3640	533	365	4991	32,195	37,186
1970	1.6%	10.3%	1.3%	1.0%	14.3%	85.7%	
	591	3811	498	382	5282	31,604	36,876
1972	1.7%	10.9%	1.5%	1.5%	15.3%	84.4%	
	587	3746	540	370	5243	29,807	34,330
1974	1.9%	11.7%	1.9%	1.5%	17.0%	83.0%	
	640	3888	621	500	5649	27,539	33,188
1975	2.5%	12.3%	2.4%	1.5%	18.7%	81.3%	
	822	4016	793	470	6101	26,570	32,671

Source: Data sheet, Office of Evaluation, Tacoma School District No. 10, "Tacoma's Ethnic Enrollment Trend" (November 1976).

As the enrollment declined from the late 1960s through 1975, so, also, did the number of teachers. In 1968 there were 2,037 certified faculty members, of whom 60 or 2.9 percent were minority. Of the 1,612 teachers in the school district in 1975, 157 or 9.7 percent were minority (see table 2).

Table 2

District Faculty Composition

Fall	Am. Ind.	Black	Asian Am.	Sp. Sur.	All Others	Total
1968	.04%	2.35%	.34%	.19%		
	1	48	7	4	1977	2037
1970	.32%	2.81%	.55%	.37%		
	7	61	12	8	2076	2164
1972	.36%	4.80%	1.02%	.48%		
	6	80	17	8	1555	1666
1974	.379%	6.38%	1.20%	.63%		
	6	101	19	10	1447	1583
1975	.186%	7.07%	1.67%	.80%		
	3	114	27	13	1455	1612

Source: Dr. Harold Snodgrass, director of information, Tacoma School District No. 10 (1976).

II. THE DESEGREGATION EFFORT BEGINS

Tacoma's effort to desegregate its school system began, as it did in numerous other communities across the land, with a growing realization on the part of school officials and other concerned citizens that equal educational opportunity was not shared by all of its children. The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in Brown v. Board of Education that, indeed, separate was not equal, provided the legal impetus for seeking to remedy Tacoma's de facto segregated schools. While desegregation controversies surfaced nationwide in the late 1950s and 1960s, Tacomans' widely divergent opinions on the subject brought increased pressure to bear on the Tacoma school board.[5]

As early as 1961, the superintendent of the school district, Dr. Angelo Giaudrone, expressed concern in speeches and public statements that problems of the central city, such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination, severely inhibited quality education. He focused attention on the developing pattern of de facto segregation in the district's schools, particularly at the elementary level, where most of the black student population was concentrated in two central city schools: Stanley Elementary, 63 percent black and McCarver Junior High, 84 percent black.

In 1963 the Tacoma Teachers Association and the Association of School Administrators appointed representatives to an ad hoc committee formed to study the problems involved in a de facto segregated setting and to recommend possible solutions. This committee had the support of both the school superintendent and the school board, but the committee generated few tangible results. The lack of progress toward desegregation that year prompted a local attorney and national board member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to state before the school board that it was the school board's responsibility to educate district students in desegregated schools.

During the following year, the school board's subcommittee to study "de facto" segregation developed recommendations to suggest ways that the district's educational resources might be distributed more evenly. The seven members of this subcommittee, two of whom were minority, urged:

1. The formulation of a school board policy on equal education opportunity;
2. Educational improvement;
3. Compensatory education;
4. Multiethnic curriculum; and
5. Interchange of students.

Three members of the subcommittee submitted a minority report that approached the desegregation issue more directly. The report supported the closing of the two central city schools that were predominantly black and the rezoning of the district's attendence areas.

The school board responded to the subcommittee's recommendations in the fall of 1965 by adopting a policy statement entitled "Equal Educational Opportunity." The statement began by affirming the district's responsibility under the State of Washington's constitution to educate all the children. It stated:

> It is the paramount duty of the State to make ample provisions for the education of all children residing within its border, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.

The board went on to define equal educational opportunity as "freedom from educational treatment based on race, color, caste, or sex" while "making ample provisions for all students within the context of individual differences and needs."[6] Although this policy statement set the tone for continued educational improvements within the district, desegregation of the schools was not favored by the school board at this time.

By 1965 the dialogue concerning whether and how to decrease racial isolation in Tacoma's schools had begun in earnest. However, it soon became clear that Tacoma's minority community viewed continued segregation as a crucial issue that merited actions beyond discussion, committee recommendations, and policy pronouncements. Less than 1 month after the school board's policy statement on equal educational opportunity was made public, the Tacoma branch of the NAACP urged its national legal division to request a Federal investigation of Tacoma School District No. 10 for possible violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The education chairman of the local NAACP branch charged that the district had evaded the problem of segregation by

failing to implement the recommendations of the subcommittee to study de facto segregation:

> To date, only suggestions for aiding the disadvantaged child in his own locale have been adopted. All suggestions involving any "mixing" by race for special citywide programs or for rezoning or closing of racially unbalanced schools have been ignored.[7]

No Federal investigation of the school district was immediately forthcoming. However, the first in a series of school board actions designed to eliminate racial isolation in the schools took place within 1 year after the NAACP charges were made.

III. THE DESEGREGATION PROCESS

On July 8, 1966, the school board announced an optional enrollment program for the McCarver Junior High School service area (the central city). This plan provided:

1. Choice of any junior high school in the district for those sixth grade pupils in the McCarver area;
2. Choice of any high school in the district for those ninth grade pupils in the McCarver area;
3. Encouragement for any student in the district to attend McCarver Junior High School provided such transfers reduce the degree of de facto segregation.[8]

The board also proposed at this time that the "strong parental feeling regarding the presumed handicapping condition of skin color or low socioeconomic status be given full consideration in the special adjustment transfer program."[9] Working from the premise that "the neighborhood school can be maintained while also giving greater freedom to parents to choose the schools that they wish their children to attend,"[10] the school board, with strong backing from the school administrators, began a gradual desegregation process.

Of the 159 students eligible to transfer from the McCarver Junior High School under this optional enrollment program, 27 did so. Only 19 of 113 students graduating from McCarver Junior High chose to attend high schools that were not located in the central city area.

At the same time as the changes in student assignment policy were announced, the school board established a citizens' committee to study the feasibility of an open enrollment policy for the entire district. This committee, composed of four white and two black members, recommended that the school district implement such a policy for all pupils in the 1967--68 school year. This suggestion was rejected by the school board on June 22, 1967, because of the heavier enrollment of students than predicted and the time needed to implement the plan before the fall opening of the public schools. The school board extended the optional enrollment policies of the previous year and expanded the program to permit transfers into and out of four central city schools (McCarver, Stanley, Central, and Byrant), provided that such transfers resulted in a more heterogeneous student body at each school.

As a result, 23 high school students, 82 at the junior high level, and 86 elementary school students were transferred. Of these 191 transfers, 61 percent were minority children and the rest were white.

Credit for the effectiveness of the limited desegregation measures was generally given to the communication efforts of the school administration because it recognized the importance of keeping the public informed about and involved in the desegregation process. As a result, thorough communication systems combined with special programs helped smooth the transition period. The summer counseling program took school counselors into the homes of families with children affected by the optional enrollment plan to explain the program and answer any questions. If parents and child decided a transfer was desirable, the family then met with counselors from the appropriate schools to discuss the ramifications of such a move. Although the superintendent and his staff maintained a low profile during this process, it is widely believed that they exerted a major positive influence on those early desegregation efforts.

The Five-Point Program

In April 1968 the school administration developed a five-point program that greatly enhanced the equality of educational opportunities in Tacoma. Although school officials recognized that local conditions did not permit the complete elimination of de facto segregation at that time, their acceptance of the five measures made clear "the school district's firm intention to move toward the ultimate solution of this problem."[11] The new program called for:

1. Transfer of McCarver Junior High School students to other district schools beginning in the 1968-69 school year in an effort to obtain a racial balance at every junior high school;
2. Conversion of the McCarver facility to an "exemplary" magnet-type elementary school open to all district students (McCarver and Central elementary students to be automatically enrolled if they desired);
3. Conversion of the Central Elementary School to a teacher training facility to improve staff skills and sensitivities;

4. Transfer of sixth grade students at Stanley Elementary School to other schools to alleviate overcrowding; and
5. Continued monitoring to prevent segregation at the district's high schools, all of which had 16 percent or less black enrollment.[12]

Significant support for desegregation was voiced by the Tacoma Association of Classroom Teachers in April 1968 as school officials prepared to implement the five-point program:

> The Tacoma Association of Classroom Teachers recognizes that racial imbalances exist in Tacoma schools, and that de facto segregation results in unequal educational opportunity. TACT requests a cooperative effort with the District in development of programs designed to eliminate and prevent de facto segregation, rather than to rely upon remedial and compensatory education. TACT also urges District involvement in curricular revision, education of school personnel in the area of human relations, and increased recruitment of members of minority groups to achieve a more multi-ethnic staff.[13]

Innovative Programs Accompany Desegregation Progress

Clearly, the momentum towards full desegregation of Tacoma's schools had been established by the 1968-69 school year. While phasing in gradual desegregation techniques (limited optional enrollment and a magnet school) over the previous 3 years, school officials introduced programs designed to enhance the quality of desegregated education in Tacoma. By 1969 many of those programs developed in the last half of the decade also benefited the largely minority central city student population:

- Of 285 children in Head Start classes, 68 percent were from the central city.

- Of 42 persons hired to improve curriculum content for multiethnic settings through the primary enrichment program, 24 were assigned to central city schools.

- Of 452 students in the summer language arts program, 62 percent were from the central city.

- During the 1968-69 school year, 111,225, 5-cent breakfasts were served at seven central city schools.[14]

The summer counseling program, however, continued to be the program that contributed the most to the successful desegregation of the public schools. Since it began in 1966, this effort had been expanded each year and by 1969, more than 1,500 home visits by counselors, teachers, and adult and student aides had taken place.

With continued community involvement and input, the school board and administration determined that further adjustments were necessary to advance the desegregation process during the 1969-70 school year. A new department of early childhood education was started to operate several district-run, day care centers and to coordinate the Head Start and Follow-Through programs. Two more elementary schools, Jefferson and Wainwright, were converted to magnet schools and combined with the 1-year old McCarver Magnet School formed the federally-funded triad program that offered specialized, individualized instruction at each of these three schools. One objective of this program was to "to lessen de facto segregation through the voluntary interchange of students."[15]

The success of the concept was apparent after the 2-year operation of McCarver's exemplary magnet program because many black students opted for schools in outlying areas while more and more white students chose McCarver. Black enrollment at McCarver declined from more than 86 percent in 1967 to just over 53 percent by October 1969.[16] School officials adopted a new attendance policy for McCarver in the summer 1969 to ensure that black enrollment at McCarver would soon reach and not exceed 40 percent of the total enrollment.[17] The new attendance policy stipulated that after August 1, 1969, only 300 McCarver area students would be accepted at McCarver and that the remaining student body of 725 would be composed of students from outside the McCarver area, so that student enrollment at McCarver would not exceed 40 percent of any one minority group.

The other two magnet schools in the triad also generated student transfers that reduced racial isolation in the school district. The black enrollment at Wainwright, which was located in a high income, suburban area, had jumped from 5 (1.3 percent) in 1967 to 65 (12.5 percent) in

1970. Similarily, Jefferson, located in a middle-upper income area with few minority residents, enrolled only 1 black student in 1967, and by 1970, there were 70 (11.8 percent).[18]

In April 1970 the State board of education and the State board against discrimination issued a joint policy statement requiring the elimination of racial segregation in Washington's public schools. The statement defined racially segregated schools as those with enrollments of 40 percent or more of any minority group.

One month after the State's action and with substantial input from parents in the affected attendance area, Tacoma school officials announced plans to convert the one remaining segregated facility to a magnet school. Stanley Elementary School, which was more than 64 percent black at that time, became the district's fourth magnet school offering ungraded, continuous progress instruction with special emphasis on a technologically advanced program.[19]

Receptive Environment for Full Desegregation

Throughout Tacoma's 6-year desegregation process, there was an absence of open hostility and debilitating conflict. Gradual implementation of the desegregation process permitted school officials ample time to prepare students, parents, teachers, and the community for a desegregated school system.

Busing never became an issue in the district because busing was and still is voluntary. School officials and Tacoma transit officials developed efficient transportation routes so that no trip took more than 20 minutes. The burden of busing was fairly shared by all racial groups of students. Before desegregation began, more than 20 percent of the district's students were bused. Desegregation was accomplished primarily through voluntary transfers and with less than 10 percent more additional busing of students. Although desegregation foes raised the issue of mandatory busing, it assumed neither practical nor rhetorical significance.

By 1970 more than 500 teachers and staff members had participated in sensitivity training to prepare them for the challenges of working in a multiethnic setting. Although

many teachers were apprehensive as changes took place in curriculum and student and teacher assignments, most teachers were in favor of desegregation and approached their new assignments in a positive manner. The 1968 statement of the Tacoma Association of Classroom Teachers was evidence of their support for the desegregation effort.

With the exception of the Tacoma branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and several key business leaders, community leadership was not involved in the desegregation process. Business and political leaders were largely noncommittal. Religious leaders generally supported desegregation but did not actively promote it. The local media, with the exception of one radio station, played a positive roll by providing the community with accurate and up-to-date information on school issues.

The responses of white parents to desegregation ranged from favorable to passive opposition. Some white students expressed fear or anger about attending a desegregated school for the first time. Other white students involved in desegregation efforts were obviously supportive. Many white students remained unaware that a desegregation program, per se, was taking place within the school system. The absence of disruption in the schools attests to the degree of acceptance that existed.

Virtually all minority students and their parents favored an end to segregation. Some minority students, who transferred, were hesitant to participate in student activities at their new schools and were uncertain of their acceptance by white students. Both the black principal at McCarver School and the black assistant district superintendent believed that more role models for minority transfer students would have helped to overcome any uneasiness and fear of failure. Students appeared to have developed greater mutual respect and understanding for each other and, today, minority students are holding more leadership positions in the schools. It is a credit to all involved that those tensions that existed in the early stages of desegregation were eased quickly.

IV. EFFECTS OF DESEGREGATION

Contributing to a smooth desegregation process was the steadily growing proportion of minority teachers in the district. Despite a 20 percent reduction in staff size between 1968 and 1975, school officials increased the minority faculty from 60 (2.9 percent) to 157 (9.6 percent) members.

In 1968 the only major transfer of teachers occurred with the opening of McCarver as a magnet school. The principal was permitted to choose his staff from the districtwide personnel.

The school administration took advantage of the available Federal funds to upgrade the curriculum throughout the desegregation process. Teaching materials were obtained that reflected the multiethnicity of American society and the contributions that minority group persons have made to our society.

Teachers and counselors reported an improvement in attendance and motivation among minority students after desegregation. It was also noted that more minority high school students had set higher educational goals for themselves--taking advantage of college preparatory courses and applying to universities where competition for admission had traditionally been quite strong.

The Tacoma community has in the past and still has retained confidence in its public school system as evidenced by the passage of school levies at a time when many levies were voted down in other parts of the State. The high number of voluntary transfers and the lengthening waiting list for admission to McCarver Magnet School indicate that parents are satisfied with the quality of education in the desegregated schools.

Desegregation of the schools has contributed to greater interdependence and increased communication between citizens of Tacoma. The successful desegregation program certainly contributed to the passage of the city's 1970 open housing ordinance. Since the ordinance was passed, minority families have been able to move into different neighborhoods, dispersing minority students throughout the school district. In this way, the city of Tacoma has been

the beneficiary of the schools successful desegregation effort.

V. CONCLUSION

Tacoma was a city uniquely prepared for desegregation. After considerable community involvement, the school board and administration implemented a sequence of measures by which all public schools were desegregated according to Federal and State guidelines by 1971. Capable school officials maintained a low profile while managing the desegregation process.

Each new policy or program was well planned and well explained. Questions about student transfers, magnet schools, curriculum revisions, and other desegregation related issues were answered directly. A great deal of individual contact was made with parents and students prior to any change. The summer counseling home visits to hundreds of families and the participation of the Stanley School area parents in planning for the desegregation of their school are prototypes that could benefit other school systems. Consideration and respect for the community paid off in Tacoma and was perhaps the most important factor in the smooth transition.

Predominantly minority schools were closed, and their students were given the choice to attend any school in the district. The vacated facilities were then converted into learning centers or special program centers. The subsequent development of four magnet schools created incentives for students to transfer to other schools through the optional enrollment policy. Curriculum revisions continuously improved the materials available for students seeking multiracial educational experiences.

Tacoma's school desegregation progressed so gradually that one high school student responded to a question about it by answering, "Oh, is Tacoma going to desegregate its schools?" Tacoma has quietly demonstrated how easily desegregation can be achieved with strong perceptive school leadership, staff commitment, innovative program planning, and patient thorough communication within the community.

NOTES

1. Tacoma, Wash., The Subcommittee to Study "De Facto" Segregation and the Tacoma School Development Council, "Final Report" (December 1964), appendix A, p. ii.

2. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Characteristics of the Population, 1970 Census of Population and Housing, vol. I, part 49, p. 12.

3. Information and statistics on the city of Tacoma and Pierce County are from The Greater Tacoma Story of Washington State, Land of Destiny, third edition, published by Frank A. Wilber (1975).

Much of the information in this report was obtained through interviews of Tacoma residents by Commission staff and Washington State Advisory Committee members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Persons interviewed included school board members, school officials, principals, parents, teachers, students, and community leaders.

4. U.S., Department of Labor, State of Washington Employment Service, "Local Labor Market Development" (June 1976).

5. Dr. Harold Snodgrass, director of information, Tacoma School District No. 10, letter to Joseph Brooks, deputy director, Western Regional Office, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Apr. 7, 1977.

6. Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma School District No. 10, "Equal Educational Opportunity" (Sept. 23, 1965), policy no. 6000.

7. Tacoma News Tribune, Oct. 19, 1965.

8. Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma School District No. 10, "Optional Enrollment--McCarver Junior High School Service Area" (July 8, 1966), policy no. 2205.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma School District No. 10, "Recommended Changes in Central Area Enrollment Patterns" (Apr. 11, 1968), policy no. 2210, p. 1.

12. Ibid, pp. 1-2.

13. Statement of the Tacoma Association of Classroom Teachers, April 1968.

14. Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma School District No. 10, "Steps Taken to Improve Educational Opportunities, Reduce De Facto Segregation and Increase Multi-Racial Education in Tacoma School District No. 10" (July 23, 1969), pp. 2-3.

15. Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma School District No. 10, "The Triad" (March 1970), p. 1. The triad or exemplary magnet program was established by the Tacoma School District No. 10 to help reduce the gap between the achievement test scores of children attending "central area" schools and the average test scores of the district's children. The three magnet schools involved each emphasized particular subject areas--reading and language arts, humanities, and science and mathematics. In addition to providing specialized, individualized instruction, the triad program was designed to and did further the desegregation process.

16. Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma School District No. 10, "Relief of De Facto Segregation at Stanley School" (May 26, 1970), p. 1.

17. Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma School District No. 10, "McCarver Attendance Policies" (June 24, 1969).

18. Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma School District No. 10, "Annual Progress Report of the Tacoma School District Regarding Desegregation of Its Schools" (December 1970), p. 3.

19. "Relief of De Facto Segregation at Stanley School," pp. 3-4.

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